

The background is a solid teal color. On the left side, there are several thin, intersecting lines in white, purple, and orange that create a dynamic, geometric pattern.

# THE BUSINESS FORUM ON KENTUCKY EDUCATION

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not a cost.

It is a debt the present owes  
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Kentucky's economic well-being is inextricably linked to the education and skills of its citizens. The relationship between educational excellence and economic growth is more critical today than it has ever been. In our modern economy, the competition is coming from nations on the other side of the world, not just from our neighboring states.

Many of those nations, and too many other states, are outpacing Kentucky at educating their young people, retraining adult workers, and creating an environment that encourages and supports family literacy, lifelong learning and skill development. Kentucky clearly has made progress since the enactment of major initiatives for early childhood, elementary and secondary, postsecondary, and adult education in the 1990s. But the improvement isn't happening quickly enough, and the state is once again at a critical crossroads. Either we mount an aggressive effort to build on our accomplishments, or we relegate our state to continued mediocrity.

Kentucky must be focused and relentless in its work to create a system of education that is truly world class. All Kentuckians have a role to play in this, none more important than the state's business community. It is the state's employers who face the competition every day and who understand the limitations created by an under-educated workforce. They must become more involved, both at the school level and in policy deliberations.

Enhancing employer involvement in education was the goal behind the formation of the Business Forum on Kentucky Education. Created in mid-2004, the Forum organized its work through four task forces that spent several months reviewing issues, hearing from experts, and considering possible initiatives in the areas of Accountability, Achievement, Alignment, and New Concepts.

These business and civic leaders developed principles reflecting their view of Kentucky's educational system and its relationship to citizens and the state as a whole. Among these principles:

- Education is an investment, not a cost. It is a debt the present owes to the future.
- Students are valued above all else.
- Kentuckians have high expectations for all students and believe that all can achieve at a high level.
- Educational achievement must be the state's top priority – with full support from political and business leaders, communities, and citizens.
- Superintendents, principals, teachers, students, and postsecondary institutions must be held accountable.
- All citizens should understand the urgency of setting high standards and expectations for students because of the impact on Kentucky's economy.

Task force members developed numerous recommendations, reflecting these principles, on ways to take Kentucky's schools to the next level of excellence. The complete task force reports, including details on the recommendations, are included in a companion document. This overview organizes the recommendations by general subject area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Ensure a Successful Beginning

Possibly the greatest return on an investment of education dollars comes from early childhood education. National research on early childhood programs has found benefit-cost ratios ranging from a minimum of 3.78-to-1 to a high of 8.74-to-1. According to the Economic Policy Institute, providing high-quality early childhood programs for the nation's 3- and 4-year-old children who live in poverty would result in increased earnings of some \$107 billion by 2050 and a savings of \$28 billion in criminal justice system costs.

#### Preschool and kindergarten:

- Fully fund preschool services for all 3- and 4-year-olds who are currently eligible and consider expanding the program for children of the working poor. Fully fund all-day kindergarten for all students.
- Increase collaboration between preschool (including Head Start and family literacy initiatives) and kindergarten programs.
- Provide early screening of all children for reading disabilities and early interventions to help them become independent readers.
- Strengthen health screenings and preventative health care for young children.

#### Child care:

- Require child-care providers to participate in the STARS center rating system as a condition of state licensing.
- Increase minimum qualifications for workers in regulated child care settings (beyond current standards of being 18 years old and free of tuberculosis).
- Increase scholarship funds available for early childhood workers.

# 2.

## Improve Academic Achievement

Although Kentucky’s academic tests show steady progress in student achievement, too many students fall behind early and never perform at acceptably high levels. Too many high school graduates need remedial work or additional training to succeed in postsecondary education or the workplace. Today’s highly competitive, global environment requires that students successfully complete rigorous coursework – whether they plan to go to college or to work – and that competency be developed early.

### Rigorous coursework:

- Require a rigorous course of study, such as the Kentucky Scholars program or one that is aligned with American Diploma Project standards, for all high school students and eliminate the track of general courses.
- Develop a model curriculum, which includes more detail than the state’s program of studies, for voluntary use by schools and districts.

### Support for student learning:

- Align teaching and learning to make sure all students learn what they need to make continual progress; for example, require algebra by the end of 8th-grade and four years of math for all high school students.
- Require regular diagnostic tests at all grade levels, based on Kentucky’s academic standards, and give students the instruction they need to learn at high levels.
- Tie students’ grades to the progress they make in meeting the state’s standards.
- Reimburse schools for the instruction of non-English-speaking students.
- Extend the school year by 10 school days to provide more time for instruction.

# 3.

## Develop and Reward Effective Teachers and Leaders

Nothing is more important to ensuring the success of students than the quality of their teachers. Kentucky is fortunate to have thousands of committed, effective teachers working in our classrooms statewide, but it is imperative that every child have a high quality teacher every year. It also is critical that each school have a strong leader—the key to ensuring success.

Kentucky falls short of providing the type of training and rewards that could strengthen leadership at the school level statewide. In addition, if school leaders are to be held accountable for student performance—and they should be—they must have the flexibility to manage their schools and districts effectively and be rewarded accordingly. Finally, the 76 percent of Kentucky citizens without children in school have an obligation to their communities, and a right as taxpayers, to participate in decisions about how to increase student achievement at the local level.

### Teacher quality:

- Establish a task force to conduct a comprehensive review and redesign of teacher preparation and certification programs in Kentucky. This would include requirements for licensure and re-licensure.
- Advocate for raising teacher certification requirements that expand teachers’ expertise in the subjects they teach. This includes requiring content speciality knowledge of all middle-school teachers.
- Redesign the professional development system to focus on improving instructional practice through such methods as creating academies in content areas, employing master teachers as mentors and trainers, and providing instructional coaches on site.
- Conduct an analysis to determine how much money is spent for professional development and realign the use of the funds to improve instruction.

### Teacher pay and working conditions:

- Review and restructure the personnel system for teachers (including tenure) to encourage the ongoing development of skills and continuous improvement of student learning.
- Create incentives to attract the best teachers and principals to low-performing schools.
- Recognize teacher leaders with financial and other rewards.



### Leader quality:

- Develop principal training programs based on best practices. This includes developing principals as instructional leaders and requiring that they be in classrooms every day.
- Provide alternate routes for the certification of principals and superintendents.
- Invest in the leadership development of principals and superintendents, focusing on improving school culture and achievement and on the ability to manage change.
- Expand the membership of school councils to include two community members, one of whom would be a private-sector employer.
- Lengthen school council terms of parents and community members to three years.
- Require more and improved professional development for school council members.
- Require school councils to collaborate with district superintendents on the hiring of principals.



### Improve High School Performance

Microsoft CEO Bill Gates recently described America's high schools as "obsolete" and ill-equipped to prepare students for the 21st century. Kentucky's high schools reflect these national conditions. Schools must be redesigned around rigor, relevance, and enhanced relationships between students and teachers/mentors.

### Student engagement:

- Develop innovative ways to engage all students in learning. Think differently about how flexible scheduling can be used to meet students' developmental and intellectual needs.
- Develop incentives for students to master basic competencies as soon as possible instead of having to put in "seat time" through graduation.
- Tie financial rewards to rigorous course-taking and achievement. For example, tie students' scores on the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, attainment of the Kentucky Employability Certificate, and other indicators of college readiness to KEES scholarships.

### Postsecondary opportunities and transitions:

- Align funding systems to give 9th-12th grade students greater access to postsecondary courses.
- Identify and address barriers to these opportunities, such as the Average Daily Attendance funding process.
- Encourage and provide incentives for pilot programs that allow students to earn a postsecondary credential after 12-13 years of education.
- Require every high school to demonstrate that its graduates have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed without remediation in postsecondary education and the workplace.

# 5.

## Hold Individuals and Institutions Accountable

Accountability is the cornerstone of Kentucky's educational system, providing information on school performance to parents, educators, policymakers, and taxpayers. Kentucky's system should more explicitly hold all stakeholders accountable for student achievement in the public schools as well as the postsecondary system of universities and community colleges.

### Elementary, middle, and high schools:

- Make sure Kentucky's Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) measures the standards necessary for workplace and postsecondary success (including American Diploma Project standards).
- Implement end-of-course assessments to hold students accountable for meeting the state's academic standards.
- Hold schools accountable for student proficiency in reading and math at the 4th- and 8th-grade levels.
- Hold superintendents accountable for improving student achievement throughout their districts, partly by imposing consequences on them for continually low-performing schools.
- Hold school councils accountable for improving student achievement, partly by imposing consequences on them for continued low performance.
- Hold principals accountable for their schools' progress on CATS and other objective measures of performance.
- Hold teachers accountable for helping all students meet high standards, in part through measures of student progress over multiple years such as "value-added" scoring methods which track individual student progress.

### Public universities and community colleges:

- Develop and finance a "performance funding" accountability system for postsecondary institutions that is tied to measurable progress on a broad range of system-wide and institutional goals.
- Hold postsecondary institutions accountable for the preparation and ongoing professional development of highly effective teachers and principals.

# 6.

## Enhance Workforce Preparation

Preparing students to succeed in the workplace is equally important to ensuring their success in postsecondary education. Kentucky also has an ongoing need to raise and diversify the skills of adults who already have jobs.

### Support for P-12 students and adults:

- Use diagnostic assessments such as ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) with all middle and high school students to provide career guidance and college readiness feedback to students and parents. Strengthen guidance and career exploration services for all students.
- Redesign postsecondary financial aid programs to serve working adults.

### Collaboration among employers and postsecondary institutions:

- Promote and institutionalize the use of industry-based credentials, such as the Kentucky Employability Certificate and the Kentucky Manufacturing Skills Standards Certificate, as part of a statewide approach to certify competencies for workers and employers. These credentials should be used for both adults and high school graduates.
- Increase the responsiveness of the postsecondary system to the needs of employers and working adults, with a focus on developing a more highly skilled workforce with strong academic and updated technical skills.

# 7.

## Expand Employer and Community Involvement

The most successful schools are those located in communities that hold them to high performance standards.

### Public, parental, and business support:

- Develop a public/private marketing campaign to create a sense of urgency among Kentuckians about the need to improve schools.
- Develop tools and technical assistance for employers to inform employees about education issues and to encourage their active participation in and advocacy for education.
- Develop strategies to further engage parents in their children's learning at all levels.
- Engage business and community representatives in a regular review and update of academic standards that are benchmarked to world-class competitiveness.
- Establish ambitious, focused academic goals at the community level that accelerate progress toward statewide proficiency objectives.
- Re-energize the work of the Early Childhood Business Council to provide continuous community feedback.

# 8.

## Improve Management and Alignment

Student achievement could be enhanced through improved management at the school and district level.

### Effective use of data:

- Provide data on student achievement to all stakeholders along with training in how to understand and use it.
- Develop a statewide data system to track individual student achievement through K-12.
- Align data systems across all educational levels to ensure that student access to the next level of education is easily attainable and results are easily tracked.
- Promote data sharing across all education and workforce sectors and make the data easily accessible and understandable.

### Streamlined system:

- Create a high-quality transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school.
- Strengthen the role and authority of P-16 Councils to enhance alignment across the system; formalize the council structure at the local and state levels.



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